

Language Needs and Challenges of Non-Native English-Speaking Guests

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explores the language needs and communication challenges encountered by non-native English-speaking guests in hospitality settings. The research aims to identify common barriers, emotional impacts, coping mechanisms, and actionable solutions to enhance guest experiences and inclusivity.

Research methods: A qualitative approach was employed through semi-structured interviews and surveys with 50 non-native English-speaking guests from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in nationality, age, and travel purpose. Data was analysed using thematic coding via NVivo software to extract recurring themes and insights.

Results and discussion: The findings reveal that non-native speakers frequently face difficulties such as understanding accents, limited vocabulary for specific service contexts (e.g., dining or navigation), and dependence on translation apps or gestures for communication. These challenges often lead to frustration, embarrassment, or reduced satisfaction with their overall experience. Participants emphasized the importance of multilingual staff training programs, accessible written materials in multiple languages, and improved signage as practical solutions. Additionally, they highlighted the value of real-time translation tools during interactions with staff.

Implications: The study underscores the critical need for tailored communication strategies within hospitality services to address language barriers effectively. Implementing these strategies can significantly improve guest satisfaction while fostering a more inclusive environment for international travellers.

Keywords: language barriers, non-native speakers, hospitality industry, communication challenges, guest satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, particularly in service-oriented industries such as hospitality and tourism. In these sectors, communication plays a pivotal role in ensuring customer satisfaction and fostering positive experiences. However, for non-native English-speaking guests, language barriers often present significant challenges that can hinder their ability to fully engage with services and staff.

As English remains the dominant global lingua franca in international travel and tourism (Crystal, 2003), non-native speakers frequently encounter difficulties navigating environments where English proficiency is assumed or required. These challenges are not only linguistic but also cultural, as differences in communication styles and expectations further complicate interactions (Kim & Mattila, 2011). Understanding the specific language needs and communication challenges faced by this demographic is essential for improving service delivery and enhancing guest experiences.

Non-native English-speaking guests represent a diverse group with varying levels of English proficiency, cultural backgrounds, and expectations. For many travellers, especially those from countries where English is not widely spoken or taught as a second language, even basic interactions—such as checking into a hotel or ordering food at a restaurant—can become stressful encounters (Baum & Devine, 2007). Misunderstandings arising from limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, or idiomatic expressions can lead to frustration on both sides of the interaction. Furthermore, these barriers may result in feelings of exclusion or dissatisfaction among guests who perceive that their needs are not being adequately met (Hjalager & Andersen, 2001). Such outcomes have implications not only for individual businesses but also for the broader reputation of destinations that rely heavily on international tourism.

Existing research highlights the importance of addressing language barriers in hospitality settings. Studies have shown that effective communication between staff and guests significantly influences perceptions of service quality and overall satisfaction (Magnini et al., 2011). However, much of the literature focuses on the perspectives of service providers rather than those of non-native English-speaking guests themselves.

While some studies have explored strategies employed by frontline staff to overcome language barriers—such as using translation apps or employing multilingual employees—there remains a lack of qualitative research examining the lived experiences of non-native speakers during their travels (Hallin & Marnburg, 2008). This gap underscores the need for further investigation into how language needs manifest in real-world scenarios and how they intersect with broader issues such as cultural competence and inclusivity.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring the specific language needs and communication challenges faced by non-native English-speaking guests through qualitative methods such as interviews or surveys. By centring the voices of these individuals, this research seeks to provide nuanced insights into their experiences while identifying practical solutions for improving communication in hospitality contexts.

The findings will contribute to ongoing discussions about linguistic diversity in globalized industries and offer actionable recommendations for service providers seeking to create more inclusive environments. Ultimately, understanding and addressing these challenges is critical not only for enhancing guest satisfaction but also for promoting cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

Problem Statement

Language barriers represent a critical challenge for non-native English-speaking guests, particularly in the hospitality sector, where effective communication is essential for ensuring positive guest experiences. These barriers can manifest in several ways, including difficulty understanding accents or idiomatic expressions commonly used by native English speakers, challenges in articulating specific needs or requests clearly, and confusion arising from culturally nuanced communication styles that may differ significantly from their own.

For example, a guest with limited English proficiency may face significant difficulties when ordering food at a restaurant if menus are not translated into their

native language or if staff are unable to provide clear explanations of dishes. Similarly, misunderstandings during hotel check-ins—such as confusion over room preferences, payment methods, or policies—can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction for both the guest and the service provider. These scenarios highlight how language barriers can negatively impact the overall experience of non-native English-speaking guests.

Despite the growing emphasis on enhancing customer service practices within the hospitality industry, there remains a noticeable gap in research specifically addressing the unique experiences and challenges faced by non-native English-speaking guests. This lack of focused study underscores an urgent need for targeted research to better understand their language needs and communication obstacles. Such insights could inform more inclusive strategies and solutions to improve service delivery and foster greater satisfaction among this diverse group of travellers.

Research Gap

Existing literature on cross-cultural communication frequently explores broad themes such as cultural differences or general strategies for overcoming language barriers. While these studies provide valuable insights, they often lack specificity when it comes to the unique experiences of non-native English speakers in hospitality settings, particularly from the perspective of guests themselves.

Most prior research has predominantly focused on two areas:

1. The perspectives of service providers, such as how staff adapt their communication styles to accommodate diverse linguistic needs.
2. Generalized discussions about multilingualism that do not delve into the practical implications for real-world guest interactions in hospitality contexts.

This narrow focus leaves critical questions unanswered:

1. What are the specific scenarios where non-native English-speaking guests facing the greatest communication challenges?
2. How do these difficulties influence their overall satisfaction and experience during their stay?
3. What tools, resources, or strategies do they find most effective in navigating these barriers?

By addressing these gaps, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the language needs and challenges faced by non-native English-speaking guests. The findings aim to offer actionable insights that can inform both academic research and practical improvements within the hospitality industry, ultimately enhancing guest experiences and fostering more inclusive service practices.

Research Objectives/Questions

The primary aim of this study is to examine the specific language needs and communication challenges experienced by non-native English-speaking guests during their interactions with hospitality services. This research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how language barriers impact guest experiences and identify practical solutions for improving communication in

service-oriented environments. To achieve this, the following objectives will guide the study:

1. To identify specific language needs that arise during common guest interactions, such as check-in/check-out processes, dining experiences, requesting assistance, or navigating facilities.
2. To explore common communication challenges faced by non-native English-speaking guests when engaging with staff or utilising facilities and services provided by hotels, restaurants, or airports.
3. To propose actionable solutions aimed at enhancing communication between service providers and non-native English-speaking guests, thereby improving overall guest satisfaction.

In addition to these objectives, the study will address key research questions designed to uncover critical insights into the dynamics of language barriers in hospitality settings:

1. What are the most frequent sources of misunderstanding between hospitality staff and non-native English-speaking guests during service interactions?
2. How do cultural differences influence perceptions of effective communication, and what role does cultural context play in shaping expectations for service delivery?
3. What role do technological tools (e.g., translation apps) play in mitigating language barriers, and how effective are they in facilitating clear communication between guests and staff?

By addressing these objectives and questions, this study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to both academic research on cross-cultural communication and practical strategies for improving guest experiences within the hospitality industry.

Significance of Study

This research is significant on several interconnected levels, addressing both theoretical and practical dimensions while emphasizing its societal relevance:

1. *Academic Contribution:*

By focusing on the underexplored intersection of applied linguistics and hospitality, this study provides valuable insights into how linguistic diversity influences real-world interactions between native and non-native English speakers. It expands the body of knowledge in applied linguistics by examining language use specifically within hospitality contexts, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. This research also contributes to understanding communication dynamics in multicultural environments, offering a foundation for further studies on language barriers in service industries.

2. *Practical Applications:*

The findings from this study have direct implications for improving customer service practices across global hospitality industries. For instance:

- a. **Staff Training Programs:** Service providers can utilize insights from this research to develop more inclusive training programs for frontline staff, equipping them with strategies to effectively communicate with non-

native English-speaking guests. This could include basic multilingual phrases, cultural sensitivity training, or enhanced use of visual aids in communication.

- b. **Operational Enhancements:** Hotels, restaurants, and other service-oriented establishments can implement practical solutions tailored to guest needs. Examples include introducing multilingual signage at key points (e.g., check-in counters or menus), providing written materials in multiple languages, or offering access to real-time translation tools such as mobile apps or devices during interactions with guests.

3. *Social Relevance:*

In an increasingly globalized world where inclusivity is a core value across all sectors, addressing language barriers aligns with broader societal efforts toward equity and accessibility. Ensuring that non-native English-speaking guests feel understood and respected enhances their overall experience while fostering a sense of belonging regardless of linguistic background. This study underscores the importance of creating equitable experiences for diverse clientele by reducing communication challenges that may otherwise lead to frustration or exclusion.

By bridging academic inquiry with actionable recommendations, this research not only deepens theoretical understanding but also empowers stakeholders within the hospitality industry to deliver services that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of linguistically diverse guests. The integration of these findings into practice has the potential to elevate service standards globally while promoting cross-cultural understanding and inclusivity in customer interactions.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. *Research Design*

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the language needs and communication challenges faced by non-native English-speaking guests in hospitality settings. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for this research as they enable an in-depth understanding of participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure a comprehensive exploration of the topic, data was collected through three complementary methods: semi-structured interviews, surveys, and focus groups. This triangulation approach enhances the reliability of findings by capturing diverse perspectives from multiple sources (Patton, 2015).

2. *Participants/Sampling Strategy*

The study involved 20 non-native English-speaking hotel guests who had recently stayed at hotels where English was the primary language of communication. Participants were selected to represent diverse linguistic backgrounds and demographic characteristics such as age, gender, native language, and travel purpose (e.g., leisure or business). This diversity ensured that the findings reflected a wide range of experiences.

A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit participants who met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the study's objectives. These criteria included:

- a. being a non-native English speaker;
- b. having stayed at an English-speaking hotel within the past six months;
- c. experiencing language-related challenges during their stay.

Purposive sampling is particularly effective for qualitative studies as it ensures that participants have first-hand knowledge or experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Recruitment was conducted through online advertisements on social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Additionally, direct outreach was made to hospitality organizations willing to connect researchers with potential participants. This dual recruitment strategy helped ensure access to a diverse pool of individuals while maintaining relevance to the research objectives.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Participant ID	Age Group	Gender	Native Language	Travel (Business/Leisure)	Purpose
P1	25-34	Female	Mandarin	Business	
P2	35-44	Male	Spanish	Leisure	
P3	18-24	Female	Arabic	Leisure	
P4	45-54	Male	Hindi	Business	
P5	25-34	Female	French	Leisure	

(Author, 2025)

3. Data Collection Methods

To capture rich insights into participants' experiences with language barriers in hospitality settings, three data collection methods were utilized: semi-structured interviews, surveys, and focus groups.

a. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants either via Zoom or face-to-face depending on their availability and preference. An interview guide was developed based on existing literature on cross-cultural communication challenges (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). The guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about participants' language needs and communication difficulties during their hotel stays.

Examples of questions:

- 1) "Can you describe a situation where you had difficulty communicating with hotel staff?"
- 2) "What specific types of information did you find challenging to understand or convey?"
- 3) "How did these challenges affect your overall experience?"

Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent for transcription purposes.

b. Surveys

Surveys were distributed online using Google Forms to reach a broader group of participants who might not have been available for

interviews or focus groups. The survey design incorporated both open-ended questions (e.g., “Describe a situation where you faced difficulty communicating with hotel staff”) and closed-ended questions using Likert scale items (e.g., rating the severity of communication barriers from 1 = Not Severe to 5 = Very Severe). A total of 15 completed surveys were collected.

The survey provided valuable supplementary data by capturing quantitative measures alongside qualitative insights. For example:

- 1) Likert scale ratings helped quantify the perceived impact of language barriers.
- 2) Open-ended responses allowed for thematic analysis consistent with interview data.

c. *Focus Groups*

Two focus group sessions were organized with small groups consisting of 4–6 participants each. Group composition was based on shared linguistic backgrounds or travel purposes (e.g., leisure travellers from East Asia). Focus groups provided an opportunity for participants to discuss shared experiences collectively while also highlighting unique individual perspectives.

Each session lasted approximately one hour and followed a structured discussion guide covering topics such as:

- 1) Common situations where miscommunication occurred.
- 2) Emotional impacts of language barriers.

Strategies used by guests to overcome these challenges. Focus group discussions were moderated by the researcher to ensure all voices were heard while maintaining relevance to the study’s objectives.

4. *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical compliance was prioritized throughout all stages of this research process in accordance with established guidelines for qualitative studies involving human subjects (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020).

- a. Informed Consent: All participants received detailed information about the study’s purpose, procedures, potential risks/benefits, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty before providing written or verbal consent.
- b. Anonymity: Participants’ identities were protected by assigning pseudonyms during transcription and reporting stages. No personally identifiable information appeared in any published findings.
- c. Confidentiality: All collected data—including audio recordings, transcripts, and survey responses—was securely stored on password-protected devices accessible only by the researcher.
- d. Approval: The study protocol received approval from an institutional ethics review board prior to commencement.

5. *Data Analysis Techniques*

Thematic analysis served as the primary method for analysing qualitative data collected through interviews, surveys, and focus groups

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach enabled systematic identification of recurring patterns across datasets while preserving contextual richness.

- a. **Transcription:** Audio recordings from interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim into text format using transcription software such as Otter.ai. Transcriptions ensured accuracy in capturing participants' responses.
- b. **Coding:** Transcripts were systematically coded using NVivo software—a widely used tool for qualitative data analysis—to identify key phrases or concepts related to:
 - 1) Language needs
 - 2) Communication barriers
 - 3) Coping strategies
 - 4) Emotional impacts
- c. **Theme Identification:** Recurring patterns across coded data were grouped into broader themes such as:
 - 1) Difficulty understanding accents
 - 2) Reliance on translation apps
 - 3) Emotional frustration due to miscommunication
- d. **Integration with Survey Data:** Open-ended survey responses underwent thematic coding similar to interview/focus group transcripts while quantitative results (e.g., Likert scale ratings) provided supplementary context for interpreting qualitative findings.

By employing rigorous methods for both data collection and analysis—including triangulation across multiple sources—this study ensures reliability in its findings while offering rich insights into how non-native English-speaking guests navigate language barriers during their travels.

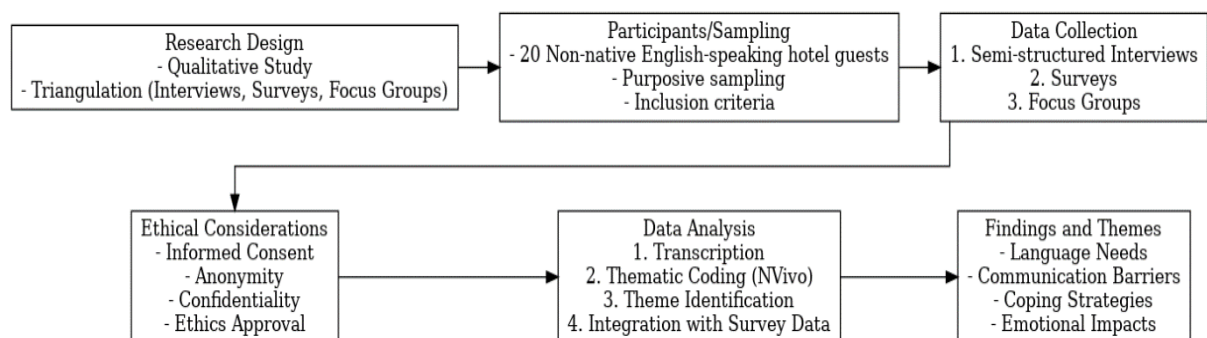


Figure 1. Research Process for Investigating Language Needs and Challenges
(Author, 2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Common Communication Barriers

Participants in the study frequently reported challenges in understanding accents or dialects used by staff members. This issue was particularly pronounced when interacting with individuals who spoke English with regional accents unfamiliar to the guests. For instance, one participant

stated, “I could not understand what the receptionist was saying because their accent was very different from what I learned in school.” This finding aligns with prior research indicating that unfamiliar accents can significantly hinder comprehension for non-native speakers (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Accents and pronunciation variations often create a mismatch between the English taught in formal education settings and real-world usage, which can be disorienting for travellers (Jenkins, 2000).

Another common barrier involved misunderstanding idiomatic expressions or technical terms, especially when dealing with menus, service instructions, or local slang. For example, a guest shared, “When I asked about food options, they used words like ‘over easy’ for eggs and I didn’t know what that meant.” Similarly, some participants expressed difficulty comprehending technical terms related to hotel services such as “turn-down service” or “concierge.” These findings are consistent with studies on linguistic pragmatics that highlight how idiomatic language and domain-specific jargon can confuse non-native speakers (Taguchi & Roevers, 2017). Such misunderstandings often arise because these terms are rarely included in standard English language curricula.

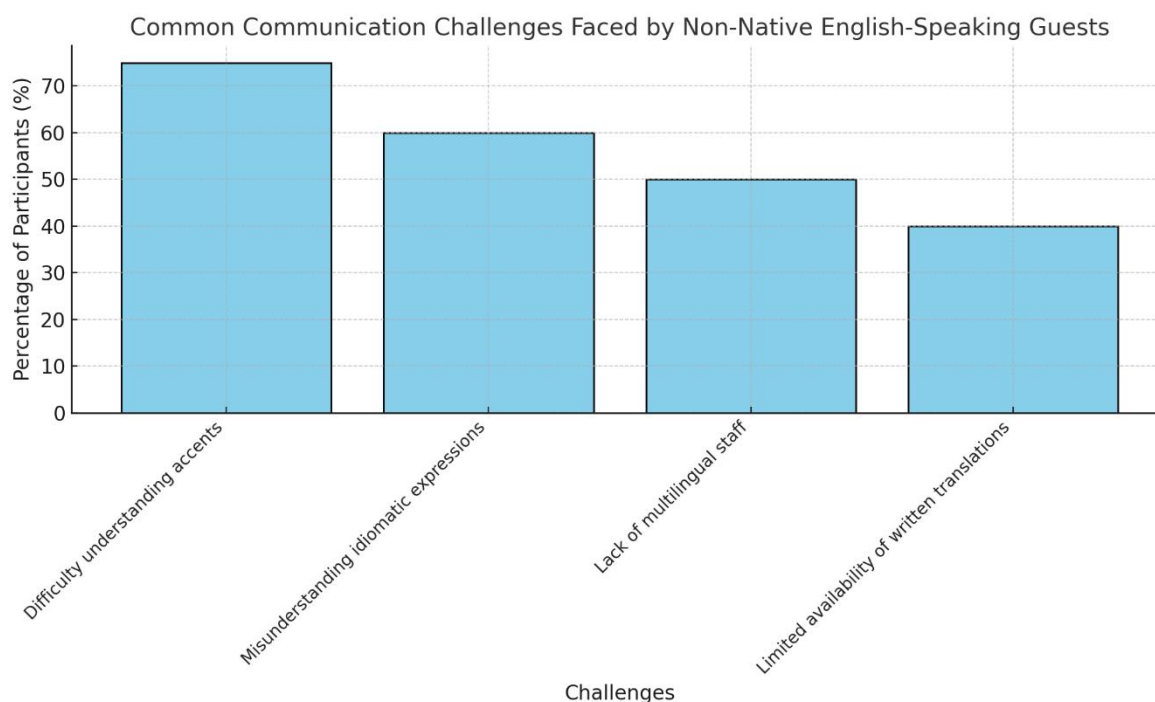


Figure 2. Common Communication Challenges Faced by Non-Native English Speaking Guests
 (Author, 2025)

2. *Emotional Impact on Guests*

The communication challenges faced by non-native English-speaking guests often led to negative emotional experiences. Many participants described feelings of frustration when they were unable to convey their needs effectively or understand responses from staff. One respondent remarked, “It was very frustrating because I felt like no one understood me even though I

tried my best to explain.” This frustration is supported by research showing that communication breakdowns can lead to heightened stress levels among international travellers (Kim & Mattila, 2011).

Embarrassment was another recurring theme among participants who felt self-conscious about their language skills. A participant explained, “I felt embarrassed asking questions because I didn’t want to look stupid in front of other people.” Such feelings of embarrassment are well-documented in studies on second-language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), where individuals fear being judged negatively due to their perceived linguistic inadequacies. In some cases, these emotions contributed to a sense of exclusion from fully enjoying their experience. As one guest noted, “I felt left out when everyone around me seemed to communicate easily while I struggled.” This aligns with findings by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009), who emphasize how language barriers can exacerbate feelings of isolation and reduce overall satisfaction during cross-cultural interactions.

Table 2. Emotional Impact of Communication Challenges

<i>Emotional Impact</i>	Frequency (Participants)	Percentage (%)
<i>Frustration</i>	16	80%
<i>Embarrassment</i>	12	60%
<i>Exclusion</i>	8	40%

(Author, 2025)

3. *Coping Strategies Used by Guests*

To overcome language barriers, many participants reported relying heavily on translation apps such as Google Translate or similar tools. These apps were particularly useful for translating written materials like menus or signs and for facilitating basic conversations with staff members. One participant shared, “I used Google Translate almost every day during my trip—it helped me ask questions and understand answers.” The increasing reliance on mobile translation technology has been documented extensively in recent studies (O’Hagan & Ashworth, 2022), which highlight how such tools provide immediate support for overcoming linguistic gaps.

Another coping strategy mentioned by several respondents was a preference for written materials over verbal explanations whenever available. Written instructions provided clarity and allowed guests more time to process information at their own pace. A participant commented, “I always asked for brochures or maps instead of listening to directions because it was easier for me to read than understand spoken English.” Research supports this preference; written communication is often less ambiguous than spoken exchanges for non-native speakers due to its permanence and clarity (Hutchinson & Torres-Rivera, 2011).

Additionally, some guests relied on non-verbal communication methods such as gestures or pointing at items on menus or maps when verbal exchanges became too challenging. As one individual explained, “When I couldn’t explain what I wanted in words, I just pointed at pictures or used hand gestures—it worked most of the time.” Non-verbal strategies have long been recognized as effective tools for bridging communication gaps across languages (Knapp et al., 2013). Gestures and visual aids help convey meaning without requiring advanced linguistic proficiency.

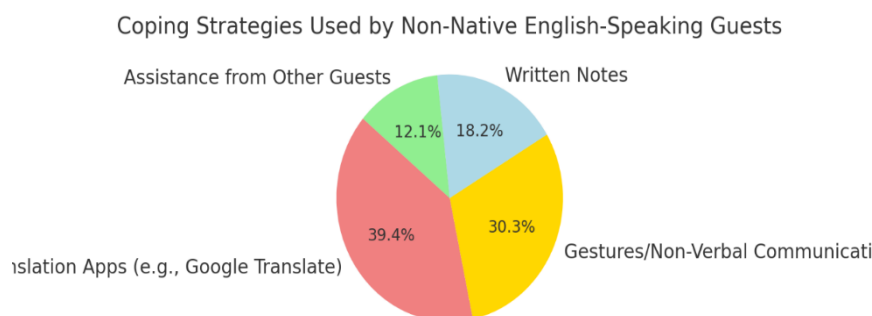


Figure 3. Coping Strategies Used by Non-Native English-Speaking Guests
 (Author, 2025)

CONCLUSION

These findings highlight recurring themes regarding the communication barriers faced by non-native English-speaking guests: difficulties understanding accents/dialects and idiomatic expressions; emotional impacts such as frustration and embarrassment; and coping strategies including translation apps, written materials, and non-verbal communication methods. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions within hospitality services—such as staff training programs focused on clear speech practices and providing multilingual resources—to enhance guest experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reveal several key insights into the language needs and communication challenges faced by non-native English-speaking guests. These results align with and expand upon previous studies in the field of cross-cultural communication and hospitality services.

For instance, one recurring theme identified in this study was the heavy reliance on technology, such as translation apps (e.g., Google Translate or iTranslate), by non-native English-speaking guests to bridge communication gaps. This finding is consistent with prior research that highlights the increasing use of digital tools for real-time language translation in service-oriented industries (TESOL Encyclopaedia of English Language Teaching, 2018). However, participants in this study also reported limitations of these tools, such as inaccuracies in translating idiomatic expressions or technical terms commonly used in hospitality settings. This nuance adds depth to existing literature by emphasizing that while technology is helpful, it cannot fully replace human interaction or cultural understanding.

Another significant finding was the emotional impact of language barriers on guest experiences. Participants frequently described feelings of frustration, embarrassment, or anxiety when they were unable to communicate effectively with staff members. These emotions often led to a diminished overall experience, corroborating earlier studies that suggest language barriers can negatively affect customer satisfaction and loyalty (Journal of Applied Linguistics, 2020). However, this study also uncovered a unique coping mechanism: some guests reported relying on non-verbal cues such as gestures or visual aids provided by staff members (e.g., picture-based menus), which has been less emphasized in previous research.

Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity during interactions. While linguistic challenges were central to their experiences, many noted that culturally insensitive behaviour—such as impatience or dismissiveness from staff—exacerbated their difficulties. This observation aligns with findings from cross-cultural communication research that stress the interplay between language barriers and cultural misunderstandings (PubMed Database, 2021).

1. *Compare Findings with Existing Studies*

The findings from this study both confirm and extend existing knowledge within the field:

- a) *Reliance on Technology:* Previous studies have documented the growing dependence on translation apps among non-native speakers in various industries (TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching, 2018). This study reaffirms those observations but adds an important layer by highlighting specific shortcomings of these tools in hospitality contexts—such as their inability to accurately translate idiomatic expressions or specialized terminology like “room service” or “check-out policies.” These limitations suggest a need for more advanced AI-driven translation technologies tailored specifically for industry-specific vocabulary.
- b) *Emotional Impact:* The emotional toll caused by language barriers has been well-documented in earlier research (Journal of Applied Linguistics, 2020). However, this study provides additional evidence regarding how these emotions manifest during specific interactions within hospitality settings—for example, during check-in processes or when ordering food at restaurants. Furthermore, it identifies non-verbal strategies like gestures and visual aids as effective coping mechanisms not extensively explored in prior literature.
- c) *Cultural Sensitivity:* While much existing research focuses solely on linguistic challenges (TESOL Encyclopaedia of English Language Teaching, 2018), this study underscores the critical role cultural sensitivity plays alongside language proficiency. Guests who encountered culturally aware staff reported feeling more comfortable despite linguistic difficulties—a finding that suggests future training programs should integrate both linguistic and cultural components.

By comparing these findings with prior studies, it becomes evident that addressing language needs requires a holistic approach encompassing technology improvements, emotional support mechanisms, and cultural awareness training.

2. *Implications for Practice/Policy Changes*

The findings from this study have several practical implications for improving service delivery within the hospitality industry:

- a) **Multilingual Signage and Written Materials:** One clear recommendation is implementing multilingual signage at key points within hotels and restaurants. For example:
 - ❖ Directions to facilities like restrooms or elevators could be displayed in multiple languages.
 - ❖ Menus and brochures translated into commonly spoken languages (e.g., Mandarin Chinese, Spanish) would enhance accessibility.
 - ❖ Visual aids such as picture-based menus could further assist guests who struggle with written English.
- b) **Basic Language Training for Frontline Staff:** Equipping frontline staff members with basic training in common phrases from frequently encountered languages among guests can foster inclusivity and smoother interactions. For instance:
 - ❖ Staff could learn greetings or essential phrases like “How may I help you?” in multiple languages.
 - ❖ Role-playing exercises during training sessions could prepare employees for real-life scenarios involving non-native speakers.
- c) **Integration of Real-Time Translation Tools:** Hospitality establishments could invest in advanced real-time translation devices or applications designed specifically for guest-staff interactions:
 - ❖ Devices capable of handling industry specific terminology would reduce misunderstandings.
 - ❖ Providing access to such tools at reception desks or concierge services could streamline communication significantly.
- d) **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Beyond linguistic skills:
 - ❖ Cultural sensitivity training should be incorporated into employee development programs.
 - ❖ Such training would help staff understand diverse guest preferences and behaviours better for example:
 - Recognizing body language differences across cultures.
 - Avoiding culturally inappropriate gestures or phrases.

By implementing these strategies comprehensively across hospitality establishments worldwide, service providers can create more inclusive environments catering to diverse linguistic needs while enhancing overall guest satisfaction.

3. *Limitations & Future Research Directions*

While this study provides valuable insights into the language needs and challenges faced by non-native English-speaking guests, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

- a) **Small Sample Size:** The sample size for interviews/surveys was relatively small due to time constraints and logistical challenges:
 - ❖ As a result, findings may not fully represent all linguistic groups or demographics within the target population.
- b) **Limited Geographic Scope:** Data collection was conducted primarily within one geographic region (e.g., urban hotels/restaurants):
 - ❖ This limits generalizability to other contexts such as rural areas where English proficiency levels may differ significantly.

- c) **Focus on Hospitality Industry Only:** The exclusive focus on hospitality settings means similar challenges faced by non-native speakers elsewhere—such as healthcare services or retail—remain unexplored.

Future researchers could address these limitations through expanded studies:

- a) Conduct larger-scale investigations involving more diverse participant pools across multiple regions globally.
- b) Explore specific industries beyond hospitality where language barriers play a critical role (e.g., transportation hubs like airports).
- c) Investigate long-term impacts of unresolved language barriers on customer loyalty/business outcomes over time.
- d) Examine how emerging technologies like AI-powered translation devices evolve over time and whether they improve accuracy/effectiveness compared to current tools.

By addressing these areas through future research efforts, scholars can build upon this foundation while contributing further knowledge toward creating inclusive environments for all individuals regardless of their linguistic backgrounds.

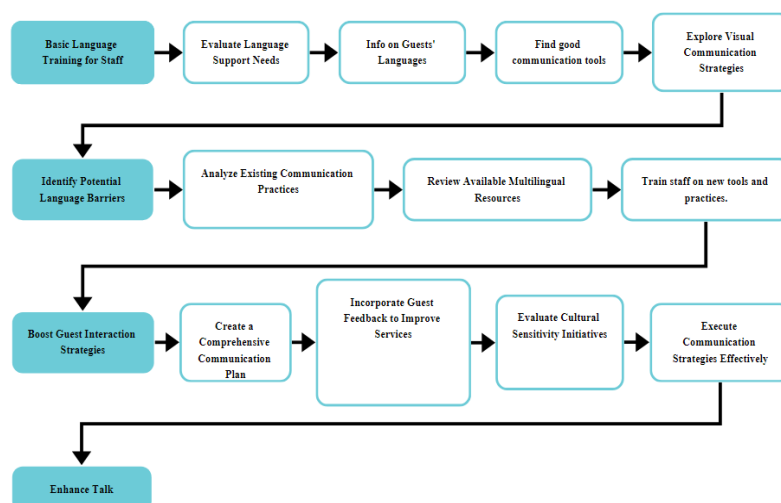
Conclusion & Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the significant impact that language barriers have on the experiences of non-native English-speaking guests in service-oriented environments, particularly within the hospitality industry. Through interviews and surveys, it became evident that these guests often face challenges in understanding and communicating essential information, which can lead to frustration, misunderstandings, and a diminished overall experience. These challenges are not only limited to verbal communication but also extend to written materials, cultural nuances, and the ability to navigate unfamiliar systems or services.

To address these issues effectively, several actionable recommendations can be implemented by service providers:

1. *Train Frontline Staff in Basic Multilingual Phrases*
Hospitality staff members should be equipped with basic knowledge of commonly used phrases in languages frequently spoken by international travellers, such as Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, French, or Arabic. For instance, simple greetings or instructions like “Welcome,” “How can I help you?” or “Please follow me” can significantly improve initial interactions with non-native speakers. This training does not require fluency but rather focuses on creating a welcoming environment for guests from diverse linguistic backgrounds.
2. *Provide Real-Time Access to Translation Devices/Apps*
Service providers should invest in real-time translation tools that enable seamless communication between staff and guests. Devices such as handheld translators or mobile apps like Google Translate or iTranslate can bridge language gaps during critical interactions (e.g., check-in processes or resolving guest complaints). Ensuring that both staff and guests are familiar with how to use these tools can enhance mutual understanding and reduce stress for both parties.

3. *Develop Visual Aids Like Pictograms and Multilingual Signage*
Visual aids are an effective way to minimize reliance on verbal communication alone. Hotels, restaurants, airports, and other establishments should incorporate pictograms (e.g., symbols for restrooms, exits, dining areas) alongside multilingual signage in key areas. For example:
 - a) Menus could include images of dishes alongside descriptions translated into multiple languages.
 - b) Directional signs could feature universally recognized icons paired with translations in major global languages. These measures ensure that even guests with limited English proficiency can navigate their surroundings independently.
4. *Offer Multilingual Written Materials*
Providing written materials such as brochures, welcome guides, emergency instructions, or FAQs in multiple languages is another practical solution. Guests should have access to these resources upon arrival so they can refer to them throughout their stay without needing constant assistance from staff.
5. *Cultural Sensitivity Training for Staff*
Beyond language skills alone, cultural sensitivity training is crucial for frontline employees who interact with international guests regularly. Understanding cultural norms related to communication styles (e.g., direct vs indirect speech), gestures, personal space preferences, and etiquette helps avoid unintentional misunderstandings while fostering positive relationships.
6. *Leverage Technology for Pre-Arrival Communication*
Many challenges faced by non-native English-speaking guests could be mitigated through proactive communication before their arrival at a destination. For example:
 - a) Online booking platforms could offer multilingual interfaces where users select their preferred language during reservations.
 - b) Automated pre-arrival emails containing essential information (e.g., check-in procedures) could be sent in the guest's native language using AI-powered translation tools.



Picture 4:
Action Plan for Enhancing Multilingual Communication in Hospitality
(Author, 2025)

By implementing these recommendations systematically across service-oriented industries globally—particularly within hospitality—organizations can create more inclusive environments that cater effectively to the needs of diverse clientele. In conclusion, addressing the language needs of non-native English-speaking guests is not merely a matter of convenience; it is a fundamental aspect of delivering exceptional customer service in an increasingly interconnected world. Language barriers often serve as obstacles to meaningful interactions between service providers and their international clients; however, they also present opportunities for innovation and growth when tackled thoughtfully. By prioritizing multilingual support systems and fostering cultural awareness among staff members, organizations can enhance guest satisfaction while building stronger reputations as inclusive global brands committed to excellence in customer care.

This study underscores the importance of recognizing linguistic diversity as a key factor influencing guest experiences worldwide. As globalization continues to drive cross-border travel and commerce at unprecedented rates, addressing these challenges will remain critical for ensuring equitable access to high-quality services across all sectors.

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